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ABSTRACT

UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems recommends that a new world information and communication order be established. This order advocates that the news media serve the public directly, and that the public in turn hold the media accountable. Alfred Korzybski's General Semantics paradigm is one system that can contribute toward achieving this order. General Semantics is a system for message evaluation that deals with such universal human values as increasing education, improving health and welfare, and contributing toward general international understanding. Its criteria can strengthen the collecting, sorting, and evaluating capabilities of mass media messages. Included in the General Semantics formulations are the following: (1) Nonallness--one cannot know all that there is to know and messages should not suggest otherwise; (2) Multivaluedness--there are many value systems in the world and messages should reflect that there is more than one way to look at a person, place, or thing; (3) Multiordinality--some words have more than one meaning; (4) Indexing--differences are often the important factors for successful communication; (5) Symbol Reacting versus Signal Reacting--effective communication should include looking into what lies behind the use of certain words; (6) the Et-Cetera Attitude--there is more to be learned about a person, place, or thing that can enhance a message; and (7) the Natural Order of Evaluating--messages based upon a foundation of that which is factual and observable are more beneficial to a society. The bulk of this paper contains applications of the foregoing criteria to front-page stories of select Caribbean and Latin American newspapers. (HOD)

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# A GENERAL SEMANTICS PARADIGM FOR INTRA-INTERCULTURAL MASS COMMUNICATING

By

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## I. INTRODUCTION

"Speech--this seemingly simple six-letter word... opens so many complex questions...."[1]

A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization report recommends that a "new world information and communication order" be established. This report by UNESCO's International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems advocates that "...journalists and media organizations serve the public directly and the public, in turn, is entitled to hold them accountable for their actions."[2]

Mass media must be relied on to substantially contribute toward such universal values as "reducing suffering, preserving health, increasing intelligence, conserving natural environments /and/ limiting armed conflicts,"[3] as well as countering racism and helping to foster further international understanding in general.[4]

This paper is constructed upon the following foundation: (1)there is a necessity to develop "further effective ways by which the right to assess mass media performance can be exercised by the public";[5] (2) further effective means whereby mass media users may check themselves; (3) news messages guide citizens in their decision-making processes; and, (4) news messages should present the "realities" of a given social context.

In addition to fulfilling the above stated premises, a worldwide mass media evaluation system must not be restricted to "western notions of right and wrong."[6]

## II. GENERAL SEMANTICS

Alfred Korzybski's General Semantics is one system which can contribute toward achieving UNESCO's international information and communication order.[7] General Semantics accommodates Eastern as well as Western cultures. For example, "no overt influence of Buddhism on Korzybskian semantics is detectable..." but, "...we might say with considerable truth that Korzybskian

semantics and Buddhism are in reality 'mergers,' and can be considered as 'a piece.'[8]

Included in General Semantics formulations are the following. (1) Non-Allness.--We cannot know all that there is to know about a given person, place or thing and our messages should not suggest otherwise. (2) Multivaluedness.--There are many value-systems in the world and/or a single society. Do mass media messages reflect that there is more than one way to look at a person, place or thing? (3) Multiordinality.--Some words have more than one meaning. Does the writer define terms when the context does not? (4) Indexing.--This criterion stresses differences which are often the important factors to consider for successful communicating. Differences counter pernicious stereotyping. (5) Symbol Reacting versus Signal Reacting.--Effective communicating should include looking into what lies behind the use of certain words which have potentially negative and/or emotional impact. Signal Reacting involves not going beyond the words for further clarification and understanding to the point of perhaps relying on trigger-reactions by decoders. (6) The Et-Cetera attitude.--That there is more to be learned about a person, place or thing enhances mass media messages. (7) the Natural Order of Evaluating.--First, experiences and then messages. Messages based upon a foundation of that which is factual and observable are more beneficial to a society and the world in general. Mass media messages constructed with second-hand information and otherwise none-facts are to be considered as fantasies, or, a Reversal of the Natural Order of Evaluating.

The "extensional" encoder follows the above criteria, checking the world around her/him as best as possible. Such a communicator tends to more adequately evaluate and represent "realities" within a given context.

The "intensional" communicator does not meet the above General Semantics criteria appropriately but constructs fantasy or otherwise "partial view/s~~/~~ of the facts"[9] which do not ade-

quately match the "realities" within a given context.

Decoders may check the validity of "realities" presented in mass media messages according to the degree to which those messages seem to meetthe General Semantics criteria.

The General Semantics criteria meet UNESCO's recommendations for a "new world information and communication order."

## III. APPLICATIONS

To test for universal validity the above General Semantics criteria will be applied to front-page stories of select Caribbean and Latin American newspapers.

A. Buenos Aires Herald, June 17, 1982. Headline: "Interior: Gov't Stable/ C. Mendez's offer to resign turned down." No by-line.

Paragraph #1. Mendez submitted his resignation to Galtieri "following Argentina's military defeat on the Malvinas islands, signalling a deepening political crisis for the current military government."

This seems to be an extensional lead paragraph stating basic factual data.

Paragraph #2. "Galtieri met last night for four hours with top Army generals in a crucial meeting to discuss Argentina's formal position on the end of hostilities on the Malvinas."

Extensional as far as it goes in a one-sentence paragraph. Did Galtieri meet with anyone else? Why not the Navy and Air Force? Certain key civilians? The paragraph lacks details on what was discussed in the meeting or the outcome. Look for any of these details later in the story.

Paragraph #3. Mention's Tuesday's /June 15th--this story in Thursday, June 17th edition/"violent" street fighting /in Buenos Aires/. Mentions "hostile crowds outside Government House."

Extensional in the sense of factual data acknowledging street demonstrations (against the government?) in the capital. Labels those demonstrations as "violent" but doesn't define by specific examples. (To be fair, there is another story in

the paper that gives more details about the demonstrations.)

Paragraph # 4. Interior undersecretary said: "'the government enjoys total stability and is carrying out its normal functions and activities.'"

Extensional in quoting a government source. But, what else would one expect a government official to say? The writer/paper provides no other qualifying statements to aid readers in understanding what the government's "normal functions and activities" are. Does the paper/writer not know what the government's "functions and activities" are, especially at a time like this? Must the paper/writer rely exclusively on what the government tells them? Do we have here an example of censorship; i. e., the paper/writer knows the government's "functions and activities" but finds it prudent not to attempt to explain? The remainder of the story may be checked and/or the entire issue of the newspaper for answers as to what the government is really doing. Succeeding issues of the newspaper can be checked over a period of time for more detailed explanations of government activities both public and private. Is there investigative reporting in this newspaper? Is it allowed?

Paragraph # 5. The Interior undersecretary denied rumors of the resignation of Interior Minister Saint Jean. But, according to the story, the reader does not know if the paper/writer knows any more about Saint Jean. This paragraph is extensional in the sense of quoting or paraphrasing a government source but lacks any indication of initiative to check other sources or Saint Jean himself. Censorship indicated again? Or, is the paper a mouthpiece for, or on the side of, the government?

Paragraph # 6. "...no certain signs of a return to democracy" is reason given by leaders of the coalition of five parties refusing to attend a meeting with Interior Minister Saint Jean.

Extensional in the sens of giving coalition leaders' reasons but nothing offered by the paper/writer as to what this could mean. No other sources offered. What is the meaning of the term "democracy" as far as the coalition of five parties is concerned? Is this the government's definition? Does the writer/

paper believe that the term "democracy" is a proper term to be used given the tenor of the times in Argentina? Following paragraph #5, is this a subtle way of the paper/writer indicating that Interior Minister Saint Jean's resignation is imminent? Is this a way of getting around censorship? At this point, is there an indication that readers must "read between the lines?"

Paragraph # 7. "The primary theme" of Army generals meeting lastnight was whether or not to "continue a formal state of belligerancy against Britain despite the surrender of Argentine troops in Puerto Argentino."

Extensional to a degree, but this is essentially what was stated in paragraph #2. Repeating is not reporting. This paragraph does not inform readers as to what the basic results were from last night's meeting of Galtieri and the Army generals. (There is another story in the paper which gives an official and succinct eleven-point statement issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff explaining from their point of view what led to the "surrender." But, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are not the same group as the Army generals. Are they? If they are two separate groups, what are the differences relative to the government? Does the reader know? What is the paper/writer doing to answer this question?

The use of the word "surrender" is to be noted in this paragraph. Is the reader to infer that the "surrender" on the islands may not constitute a "surrender" by the government of all of Argentina? Is it possible that the "war" will continue? What is the paper/writer telling the public? Is the wording in this paragraph another subtlety on the part of the paper/writer indicating that the government is finding the"surrender" at the islands an exceedingly difficult fact to deal with relative to the citizens of Argentina?

Paragraph # 8. States a demand on the part of British Prime Minister Thatcher to the effect that Argentina must "cease all hostilities" before prisoners are returned and before economic sanctions are lifted.

This appears extensional on the part of the paper/writer, more than is perhaps expected if censorship conditions exist.

On the other hand, such a statement in this story may be fully endorsed by the government as good reasons for Argentina agreeing to a "surrender".

Paragraph #9. A statement that the Navy and Air Force top commanders are meeting separately to discuss whether or not Argentina should "cease hostilities."

Extensional statement in the sense of reporting what Navy and Air Force commanders are doing. But, no explanation as to why there are separate meetings of Army generals, Navy commanders, Air Force commanders and Joint Chiefs of Staff to determine whether or not Argentina should continue hostilities. Does this paragraph indicate that the government might be in an unstable condition(contrary to what government sources have said) with various factions having their own meetings?

Paragraph #10. Unnamed military sources are quoted as saying that within the past few days 14 Army generals (unnamed) have drafted a document which suggests alternatives presently open to the government: (1) continue the war; (2)continue the war while negotiating peace; or, (3) negotiate after ceasing hostilities.

This is extensional reporting that such a document allegedly exists according to sources outside the newspaper. This paragraph could be more extensional with names of the 14 Army generals, when and why the document was drafted. What is going to be done with the alleged document?

Paragraph # 11. Sources further say that 12 of the 14 generals opt for the last alternative listed in paragraph #10. Who are the two not voting for the third alternative? Why? What do they want? Is this important? These questions are not answered.

Depending on the censorship climate simply publishing that there are allegedly 14 generals who have signed such an alleged document may be placing the paper in jeopardy. Is this information being independently used by this paper or by order of the government?

Paragraphs #12 & #13. President and Army Commander in Chief Galtieri placed total responsibility for the surrender of the Malvinas on the generals at the scene and Galtieri publicly disassociates himself from the surrender document.

Extensional in the sense of reporting Galtieri's public position on the matter of the Malvinas surrender. The paper/writer offers nothing else to explain Galtieri's position and what his position on the matter means to the country. On the other hand, the basic information about Galtieri's public position might be easily passed by censors in case the masses want the war to continue. Glatieri has thus covered himself. Again, who is the paper working for? The people or the government?

Paragraph #14. Quotes sources as saying that Interior Minister Saint Jean favors continuing the war.

Extensional to a degree in quoting a source but lacks indications of attempting to interview Saint Jean himself or to get other verifications.

Paragraph #15. According to a communique issued last night by the Joint Chiefs of Staff the cease fire applies only to General Menendez and his troops on the islands.

Extensional in reporting the Joint Chiefs of Staff communique. This paragraph is given further credibility because a photograph of the surrender document is printed elsewhere in the paper. On the other hand, this paragraph could work nicely for the government in giving it the opportunity to continue the war. The government is not responsible for the foolish general at the scene!

Paragraphs#16 through #19. Repeats in other ways what has already been presented in the story about Galtieri's position and that the Puerto Argentino surrender did not necessarily mean "the end of the struggle."

Extensionalism in doubt. Repeating is not reporting!

Paragraph #20. Foreign Minister Costa Mendez is reported to be the only senior official in the government to use the term "surrender."

Probably extensional in light of earlier paragraphs cited in this same story, plus other stories in this issue of the paper indicating directly or indirectly that the government

is having difficulty with the word "surrender." But, here is where the paper/writer could help to enlighten readers as to distinctions to be made between "surrender" and "cessation of hostilities." Who uses which terms? Why? What difference does it mean to the country?

Paragraphs #21 through #23. To the effect that the United States has offered to airlift food and supplies to Argentine prisoners on the Malvinas islands and the commander of the British forces on the islands has indicated that there will be no further attacks by the British naval task force.

Extensional data with information from the United States and the British forces. Further information could be given as to when the United States would start the airlift, how much, what items, et cetera.

Summary. There is no by-line to this story but the following news agencies are credited: NA, DYN, Reuters and United Press. To lend further extensionality to the story there is a photograph with the following caption: "The verbal resignation submitted by Foreign Minister Nicanor Costa Mendez to President Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri yesterday highlighted the apparent military government crisis which has followed the defeat of Argentine forces in Puerto Argentino on Monday. Costa Mendez is seen above at a foreign ministry ceremony yesterday. (DYN photo)" A photograph of one government official whose resignation is in question and the phrasing "apparent military government crisis" are facts contributing to the extensionality of the overall message.

There is no obvious indication on the part of the paper/writer that Allness is being used. So many questions are left unanswered with what may be termed a sterility to the style of the story. In all fairness, one must keep in mind that such a style may be a manifestation of a degree of censorship. This story may be given some credit for Multivaluedness and Indexing with quoting of British and United States sources, one high Argentine government official thinking that "surrender" has taken place totally, meetings of various military factions considering different al-

ternatives and four news agencies cited as contributing information--two of whom have excellent worldwide credentials, Reuters and United Press. No-Multiordinality is observed in the story with a lack of definitions provided for such terms as "surrender," "hostilities," and "democracy." Certainly, this story reflects a lack of going beyond potentially emotion-triggering words/terms such as "resignation," "Argentina's military defeat," "political crisis," and "violent street fighting." An implied Et Cetera attitude may be attributed to the paper/writer in the obvious sterile style referred to earlier. The story presents too many unanswered questions. A perceptive reader could infer that the paper/writer presents a sterile statement and then whispers between the lines: 'What about that? What about this? Don't we need to know more about such-and-such?' This story relies on limited facts from some sources who suffer a lack of credibility. Sources outside the newspaper office seem to have written the story. The Natural Order of Evaluating needs to be strengthened by more objective sources including newspaper staff members. Is the newspaper supporting the present government? Is there a government censor literally passing every item to be published? This story does not contribute adequately toward presenting and explaining the "realities" which exist for the Argentine peoples.

B. The Sunday San Juan Star, July 25, 1982. Front-page local story: "Did cops frame Bayamon man in murder?" Story by Gino Ponti and copyrighted by The San Juan Star. Three photographs accompany the story. A qualifying paragraph is offered

before the story begins:

"(William Gordon Pagan, 40, of Bayamon has been in prison here since 1976, convicted of the murder of a Ponce man in 1974. A STAR investigation by reporter Gino Ponti has uncovered evidence that indicates police framed Gordon Pagan by means of a false eyewitness. This is the first of a three-part series.)"

"Part 1--The alleged frame-up"

Paragraph #1. A Star investigation "has uncovered evidence which strongly indicates" that police framed a Bayamon man for murder and "subsequently attempted a coverup."

Intensional, personal opinion of the writer with no factual data to substantiate what he is saying. Data may come later in the story. Look for it.

Paragraph #2. William Gordon Pagan, 40, "was convicted solely on the testimony of an 'eyewitness' who the Police Department's own legal division concluded was not at the scene of a Ponce murder when it occurred."

Extensional in naming the convicted man and his age. There is no proof provided in this paragraph that the man was convicted "solely" on the basis of an eyewitness who is suspect. What do the court records show? Where is the evidence that the eyewitness is suspect? What does the Police Department's legal division say about the eyewitness not being at the scene of the murder when it occured? No quotations here. This paragraph is basically intensional. Be on the lookout in the rest of the story for factual data substantiating statements made by the writer in this paragraph.

Paragraphs 3 through 11. A list of what the Star has found in its investigation.

(1) "...the Police Department's Legal Division recommended that two Criminal Investigations Corps agents be expelled from the force for perjury, fabrication of evidence and fabrication of an 'eyewitness.'" Agents not expelled according to writer and states no evidence that Justice Department was notfied.

(2) Internal police investigation taken from the original civilian investigator, [conflict of terms here], given to a Police Superintendent. "The course of the investigation was altered" from that point.

(3) The eyewitness had been previously turned down from the police force. Two months after the eyewitness gave a sworn statement that he had seen the murder and identified the killers "he was accepted as a police cadet."

(4) The eyewitness refused to take a lie detector test after becoming a policeman and was dismissed. The eyewitness was also under investigation for alleged illegalities related to motor vehicle registrations and licenses.

(5) A Criminal Investigations Corps agent who filed charges against two of his colleagues was judged to be telling the truth that the eyewitness was a phony. The officers who allegedly set up the phony eyewitness were not fired but the agent who reported them was let go.

(6) Notes taken at the murder scene by one of the CIC officers allegedly guilty of setting up the phony eyewitness

indicate that the so-called "eyewitness" did not arrive on the scene until after the crime had been committed.

(7) A female car dealership employee testified that the eyewitness did not know about the crime until after she had told him.

(8) & (9). The convicted man had four persons accounting for his whereabouts at the time of the crime.

All of the above is intensional on the part of the writer at this point. Will there be authoritative sources to back these statements up later in the story? Thus far, there is only the writer's point of view with no factual data.

Paragraph 12. The Star's above "findings" were recently turned over to the current Police Superintendent who will determine whether or not the matter is to be referred to the Justice Department's Special Investigations Bureau to reopen the case.

Extensional if it is a fact that the Star's information has been turned over to the current Police Superintendent and if he said he would look into the matter. Why not a quotation from the Police Superintendent here?

Paragraphs 13 through 33. Backgrounding presented on the 1974 crime and various civilian and police involved. Includes how accusations by Carlos Rivera, the Ponce CIC agent who turned his fellow officers in, led to the investigation of his two colleagues for allegedly falsifying an eyewitness.

Readers must accept the writer's version without sources to substantiate what he is saying. Reader needs to be incred-

ulous at this point. We have only the writer's word with no supporting evidence. These paragraphs must be labeled intensional for the time being.

Paragraph 34. The writer quotes from a recent statement by Carlos Rivera--the agent who turned his pals in--relative to the alleged false eyewitness who later became a policeman. "...I knew this guy had no place on the force...It's what made me decide to tell the turth even though it cost me some of my friends."

This is the writer's first attribution and it's not necessarily a strong one. According to what the writer has not presented up to this point, the reader can wonder if Rivera may have had ulterior motives back in 1974 and currently. Has Rivera remained off the police force since he was let go a few years ago? How does Rivera make his living now?

Paragraphs 35 through 41. Recounts two further murders of gangland-type men who were directly or indirectly involved with the original 1974 murder. Also, three policemen charged with one of the subsequent murders and then had their cases dropped.

Paragraph 42. "Part II Monday, will deal with the irregularities in the 1975 police investigation and alleged attempts by police officials to cover up incriminating results."

Summary. This seems to be a good exercise for the General Semantics criteria established at the beginning of this study. The writer of the story indicates throughout that he thinks the wrong man has been convicted and some police then and now are guilty of various illegal actions in the case. He does not

suggest that all of the police are crooks, only some of them. Thus, the writer is not guilty of Allness in his thoughts about the police. However, there is some Allness to be attached to the writer's insistence that he knows all that he needs to know to lead him to believe that the man in jail is innocent. The reader must take a wait and see attitude about this. No-Multivaluedness is evident in that no other points of view are presented with the exception of one weak source, the former (?) CIC agent who snitched on his buddies. The vocabulary and syntax of the story present simple and reasonably clear language, thus, no problems are evident with the Multiordinality criterion. The major Indexing factor is found with the differences between Police Department Legal Division recommendations in the original investigation and positions that various other police officials took in alleged opposition to the recommendations. A case could be made for Signal Reacting words being used in the front-page headline, "cops frame." Such words seen on a newspaper front-page could stir emotions in some readers who have a predisposition against policemen. But, within the story there does not seem to be a purposive use of Signal Reacting words on the part of the writer. The writer does get behind a key word throughout the story, "eyewitness." This is a three-part story and thus it is not surprising to find a "teaser" at the end of this first part to the effect that there is to be more divulged by the writer. Whether this is a valid Et Cetera attitude remains to be seen. For instance, the current Police Superintendent's review of the documents in the case could lead to another investi-

gation which might shed more light on who did what. If factual data substantiates much of the writer's statements in this first part of his story then his message was constructed by way of a Natural Order of Evaluating. The problem with this first installment is that almost all of what the writer presented lacks factual data, including documents and authoritative sources. Perhaps this substantiation is forthcoming in the next two installments. Allegations on the part of a newspaper reporter are one thing, facts may be another. The writer must present objective, factual data in order to establish more accurate "realities" for the public whom he serves. The reader hopes that the writer has no ulterior motives and that serving his public is his basic aim.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to present a universal system of evaluating "realities" for encoders and decoders of mass media messages.

General Semantics is a system for message evaluation which deals with such universal human values as increasing education, improving health and welfare and contributing toward general international understanding.

General Semantics criteria can strengthen the collecting, sorting and evaluating capabilities of encoders of mass media messages. The same criteria may be applied

by decoders attempting to ascertain the quality of the mass media messages to which they are exposed. More adequate

evaluating by encoders and decoders can lead to a sharper focus on the "realities" within a given social context.

A multiplicity of corroboration is advised to avoid inaccurate evaluating when using General Semantics criteria. As an example, when evaluating press news check all of the sotries in the same issue of the paper. Check other issues of the paper over a period of time. Check a series of stories by the same author. Compare the same story in one medium with other media and authors. Have several persons apply the same criteria to the same story and compare results. Different persons in different nations applying General Semantics criteria to the same story could contribute appreciably to international understanding.

Using General Semantics as one evaluative tool relative to mass media messages appears to be especially applicable to UNESCO's recommended "new world information and communication order."

## FOOTNOTES

[1]Franklyn S. Haiman, Speech And Law In A Free Society, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 15.

[2]Many Voices, One World,(Report by UNESCO's International Commission for Study of Comm Problems),New York: Unipub, 1981, pp. 262, 268.

[3]Carl B. Becker, "Philosophical Perspectives On Values And Ethics In Speech Communication," Department of Philosophy, Southern Illinois University, paper delivered at 1982 SCA convention, Louisville, p. 6.

[4]UNESCO, Op. Cit., p. 271.

[5]Ibid., p. 262.

[6]William S. Howell, "Carrying Ethical Concepts Across Cultural Boundaries," University of Minnesota, paper delivered at 1982 SCA convention, Louisville, p. 1.

[7]Alfred Korzybski, Science And Sanity: An Introduction To Non-Aristotelian Systems And General Semantics, Fourth Edition, Lakeville, Connecticut: The International Non-Aristotelian Library Publishing Company, 1958.

[8]John Calhoun Merrill, "Korzybskian Semantics And Buddhism: Some Philosophical Parallels," Asian Profile, (October, 1977),462.

[9]Fernando Reyes Matta, "The Concept Of News In Latin America: Dominant Values And Perspectives Of Change," in News Values And Principles Of Cross-Cultural Communication, Paris: UNESCO, 1980, p. 48.

[10]William A. Leonard, from a speech delivered at the 1982 SCA convention, Louisville. Leonard is recently retired as President of CBS News.